

Analyzing Primary Sources Activity

The logo for 'networks' features the word 'networks' in a bold, lowercase sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a stylized graphic consisting of several thin, intersecting lines that form a circular, web-like pattern.

The New Frontier and the Great Society, 1960–1968

John F. Kennedy on the Cuban Missile Crisis

Background

The foreign policy of the United States and of President John F. Kennedy received one of its sternest tests on October 22, 1962. On that day, the Cuban missile crisis threatened to engulf the United States, the Soviet Union, and much of the world in the worst of all types of conflicts—a nuclear war. To resolve the crisis, two nations that were normally enemies had to find a way to cooperate.

Directions: Read the excerpt below from President Kennedy's October 22, 1962, television address concerning the Cuban missile crisis. Then answer the questions that follow.

This government, as promised, has maintained the closest surveillance of the Soviet military buildup on the island of Cuba. Within the past week, unmistakable evidence has established the fact that a series of offensive missile sites is now in preparation on that imprisoned island. . . .

The characteristics of these new missile sites indicate two distinct types of installations. Several of them include medium-range ballistic missiles, . . . Each of these missiles . . . is capable of striking Washington, D.C., the Panama Canal, Cape Canaveral, Mexico City, or any other city in the southeastern part of the United States, in Central America, or in the Caribbean area.

Additional sites not yet completed appear to be designed for intermediate range ballistic missiles capable of traveling more than twice as far—and thus capable of striking most of the major cities in the Western Hemisphere. . . .

Acting, therefore, in the defense of our own security and of the entire Western Hemisphere, and under the authority entrusted to me by the Constitution as endorsed by the resolution of the Congress, I have directed that the following initial steps be taken immediately.

First: To halt this offensive buildup, a strict quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba is being initiated. . . .

Second: I have directed the continued and increased close surveillance of Cuba and its military buildup. . . . Should these offensive military preparations continue, thus increasing the threat to the hemisphere, further action will be justified. . . .

Third: It shall be the policy of this nation to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States, requiring a full retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union.

Analyzing Primary Sources

Activity *Cont.*

networks

The New Frontier and the Great Society, 1960–1968

Fourth: As a necessary military precaution, I have reinforced our base at Guantanamo, . . .

Fifth: We are calling tonight for an immediate meeting of the Organ of Consultation under the Organization of American States, to consider this threat to hemispheric security. . . .

Sixth: Under the Charter of the United Nations, we are asking tonight that an emergency meeting of the Security Council be convoked without delay to take action against this latest Soviet threat to world peace. . . .

Seventh and finally: I call upon Chairman Khrushchev to halt and eliminate this clandestine, reckless, and provocative threat to world peace and to stable relations between our two nations. . . .

Our goal is not the victory of might, but the vindication of right—not peace at the expense of freedom, but both peace and freedom, here in this hemisphere, and, we hope, around the world. God willing, that goal will be achieved.

—from Televised Speech to the American People,
John F. Kennedy, October 22, 1962

Critical Thinking

1. What does Kennedy maintain is the purpose for Soviet military buildup in Cuba?
2. What steps does Kennedy propose be taken against the Soviet action?
3. How does Kennedy justify his actions?
4. How would the Soviet Union have reacted if Kennedy had not insisted on the removal of the missiles?